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The Santa Barbara Channel Islands

Chartered four centuries ago, these islands remain protected from urbanization offering mainlanders a quiet, natural retreat.

When Cabrillo landed in 1542 at Anacapa, the easternmost of the eight Channel Islands, he probably did not appreciate its offer of peaceful solitude. But today that offer tempts California mainland visitors from urban areas like Los Angeles just 100 miles to the south.

Anacapa not only promises seclusion and tranquility but beauty as well. James Whistler sketched the 40 ft. Arch Rock for the U.S. Coast Guard Survey in 1856. This natural bridge, though the most dramatic, is not the only rock formation. Many volcanic faults and fissures have been ordered by the sea, creating cliffs, wave-cut benches and other configurations. A particularly good view of a blowhole and surge channel can be seen near Cat Rock.

Anacapa's name comes from the Chumash Indian word "eneepah" which means distortion. From a distance the three islets that make up the island Portola, in 1969, called "Las Mesitas" (little tables) appear as a mirage. Although some of the seafaring Indians lived on Anacapa the majority of their population inhabited the larger islands of Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, and San Miguel.

In 1938 Anacapa, Santa Barbara and

San Miguel islands were declared the Channel Islands National Monument by presidential proclamation. A variety of bird species including brown pelican, barn owl, burrowing owl, meadowlark and oyster-catcher can be seen and heard. The steep cliffs and slopes provide nesting grounds for the once endangered pelicans. Mice, domestic rabbits, lizards, sea lions and occasionally elephant seals make up the animal life.

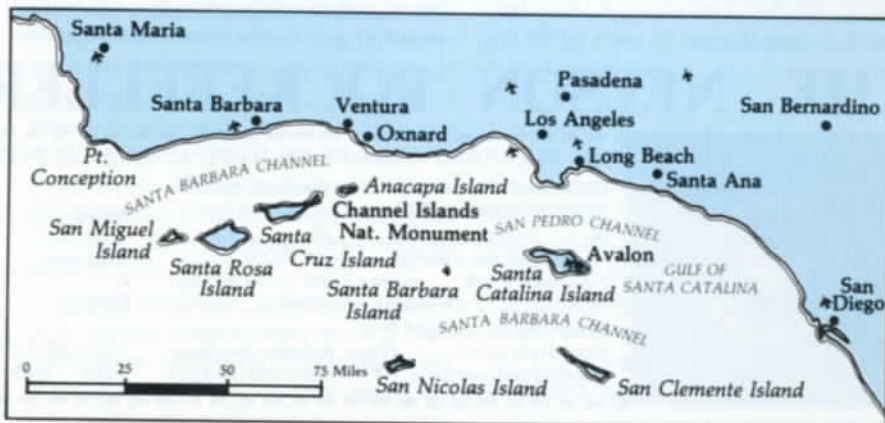
Giant coreopsis, or tree sunflower, the most visible form of plant life on the island, may grow as tall as 10 feet; large yellow flowers bloom in spring creating a striking contrast to the otherwise stark landscape.

Winter visitors to the islands, on a good day, may see as many as 100 grey whales pass by on their way to calving grounds in Baja California. The surrounding sea also offers the visitor a variety of seals, rays

and other marine life. Since the islands are in an intertidal zone the rocks and depressions are exposed to air and drowned twice daily. Thus these tidepool inhabitants are capable of sustaining life in both worlds. Great caution must be used around tidepools in order to protect the marine life.

The 225-foot side-wheeler steamer *Winfield Scott* grounded and sank off Anacapa in 1853. Its 250 passengers spent several days on the middle islet before being rescued by the *California*. Plans began then for a beacon but it was not actually constructed until 1912. In 1966 an automated lighthouse replaced the beacon as the primary warning device for the island.

Santa Barbara Island, named by Visciano in 1602 as he sailed past on St. Barbara's Day, was a missile photographic tracking station for the Navy in the 1950's. Now it is open to the public for



Opposite: Lighthouse at Fisherman's Wharf, a colorful area of specialty shops and restaurants in the Channel Islands Harbor. Above: Forty foot high Arch Rock is often considered Anacapa's trademark.

fishing, diving, camping, and day visits.

San Miguel, the westernmost island, is still owned by the Navy but is operated by the National Parks Service. It is the only island that can boast of six species of pinnipeds, more than any other island in the world. Point Bennet provides the largest population display of seals and sea lions. Visitors must register in advance for camping and should be prepared for 20-30 mph winds even in summer. Caves, coves and shipwrecks are there for divers to explore; hiking on designated trails is an adventure for landlubbers.

San Nicolas Island is the home of 300 rare bulbous-nosed sea elephants. Sea otters once covered this 9-mile long, 3-mile wide island but as many as 50,000 were killed over a five year span in the 1830's. One Indian woman was left on the island when she jumped the missionaries' boat to collect her missing baby. Eighteen years later she was found in perfect health and was brought to the mainland. In order to learn her language, efforts were made to locate the Indians who had been taken away two decades earlier from San Nicolas. The efforts failed. Three months later, primarily due to her radical change in diet, the woman died.

San Clemente is shared by 20,000 goats and the U.S. military. According to legend, the island was a home for earlier pirates. Buried treasures, unsuccessful mining operations, Chinese smuggling, and prohibition bootlegging also added color to this island of sand dunes.

In contrast to San Clemente's lack of trees, Santa Cruz Island harbors oaks, almond trees and pines. Rivers, brooks and waterfalls add to the image of paradise. In the late 18th century this eden was used as a penal colony by the Spaniards. A Frenchman in the 19th century populated the island with French and Italian immigrants and began a colony complete with vineyard, shops and chapel.

In the 1930's the island was offered for sale to the State for \$750,000. Because of Depression worries the offer was not accepted. A Laguna Beach resident later purchased the land to raise cattle. Part of the Kennedy Administration's plan to expand the National Parks could include the acquisition of Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa Islands, both now privately owned.

The one remaining island, Santa Catalina, is just "26 miles across the sea" from Los Angeles. One nautical mile around each of the eight islands is protected as part of a California Ecological Reserve.

For more information on the Channel Islands National Monument contact the superintendent at his headquarters, 1699 Anchors Way Dr., Ventura, CA 93003, telephone (805) 644-8157.

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